

A GENUINE

[6]

# A C C O U N T

OF THE

Behaviour and Dying Words

OF

WILLIAM DODD, LLD.

Who was Executed at Tyburn for FORGERY,  
on FRIDAY the 27<sup>th</sup> of JUNE, 1777.

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By the Reverend JOHN VILLETTE,  
ORDINARY of NEWGATE.

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A  
GENUINE ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
Behaviour and Dying Words  
OF  
WILLIAM DODD, LL.D.

CUSTOM having almost established it as a law, that the Ordinary of Newgate shall give the Public some account of convicts who suffer death by the laws of their country, if such convicts have been by their birth, education, or particular spheres of action, distinguished from the multitude, and thereby attracted the attention of the public, I find myself under a painful necessity of saying something concerning the unhappy

William Dodd, LLD. who was executed on Friday the 27th of June, 1777. As it was the desire of the Doctor, that if any account of his life should be published, it should be done by his brother and the Rev. Mr. Butler his faithful friend, who has been intimately acquainted with him and his connexions for many years past, and the Public have been already told in the news-papers that no other account shall be regarded as authentic but what may hereafter be published by these gentlemen, I shall wave saying any thing of him, but what naturally arises from the time that I, to my great grief, was under a necessity of becoming acquainted with him, and of paying attention to the state of his mind in Newgate. My particular acquaintance commenced with him after his having received sentence of death, when he sent me the following card.

Saturday, Four o'Clock.

“ Dr. Dodd's respects to Mr. Villette;  
 “ and he will esteem it a favor, if he will  
 “ inform him, whether there is a sacrament  
 “ at the chapel to-morrow; and if there is,  
 “ Dr. Dodd would be glad to attend; and  
 “ would



“ would esteem it a very great favor, if Mr.  
 “ V. would be kind enough to call upon him  
 “ in the morning, and permit him to accom-  
 “ pany him to the chapel.”

From this time my chief acquaintance began with the Doctor, and my visits became more frequent in proportion as the time of his death drew nearer. I had heard that his behaviour in gaol had been very trifling, and his employment very improper for a man in his terrible situation ; but the following letter I hope will sufficiently evidence, that he neither thought with levity of his state, or had any inclination to employ his time improperly.

DEAR SIR,

“ In consequence of our conversation, I  
 “ have perused *Rossell's* book\* with attention.  
 “ There is a great deal of good matter in it,  
 “ but ill-digested, and often very ill expressed.  
 “ I have been at much pains to reform what  
 “ appeared to me erroneous, and to arrange  
 “ what is irregular and confused. To say the  
 “ truth, I have spent many hours in an en-  
 “ deavour

\* A book of devotions for the use of prisoners.

" deavour to render his work more uniform,  
 " and consequently more useful. How far  
 " I have succeeded, I cannot tell ; for I freely  
 " own to you, that his multiplicity of chaotic  
 " matter has often so entangled and perplexed  
 " me, that I have been scarce master of my  
 " own ideas, and I verily believe could have  
 " composed a work on the subject with less  
 " trouble than it has cost me to revise this.  
 " And after all, I am doubtful whether the  
 " upshot of the matter, in this arrangement,  
 " will not be the same with me as with those  
 " who, under a notion of saving expences,  
 " repair, add to, and reform an old building,  
 " which, after all, is but an old one, and in  
 " the end commonly turns out as expensive,  
 " though by no means so commodious, as  
 " one entirely new would have proved. Of  
 " this, however, you, Sir, must be the best  
 " judge, whose experience on these heads is  
 " preferable to any mere ideas of my poor  
 " brain, especially in its present disturbed  
 " and unsettled state. Had I been master of  
 " more leisure, or longer time, I think I  
 " could have made the book better, and more  
 " calculated to answer its humane design.

" As

“ As it is, and solicitous as I am to improve  
 “ every moment in my present awful state,  
 “ you will accept what I have done, as a  
 “ little tribute of my good-will to you, and  
 “ as a proof that I am desirous, in every situ-  
 “ ation, to do all in my humble power to  
 “ contribute a mite to the best welfare of  
 “ my fellow-creatures. It does not become  
 “ me to advise or prescribe to you, but I  
 “ should think, if you found my improve-  
 “ ments of consequence, still heightened by  
 “ any observations of your own, or any other  
 “ serious and discrete clergyman, it might  
 “ be well to publish the book with the con-  
 “ sent, and under the sanction of the Cor-  
 “ poration of London, who are ever ready  
 “ to promote works calculated for the real  
 “ benefit of mankind. I could wish that a  
 “ short *Address* to my unhappy fellow prison-  
 “ ers, which I have written, and will com-  
 “ municate to you, might be prefixed to the  
 “ work ; as, perhaps, from the sad singularity  
 “ of my unfortunate circumstances, it may  
 “ gain more attention from them than the  
 “ much better labours of another person.  
 “ That



“ That God may bless and assist you in the  
 “ due performance of your doleful, but ne-  
 “ cessary and important office, is, Sir, the  
 “ fervent prayer of

“ Your dying brother,

(In our common Lord)

“ WILLIAM DODD.”

During his confinement in gaol, he lived with great temperance, though he might (as he himself said) have lived luxuriously, through the benevolence of his friends, whose kindness and zeal for him were beyond expression. The tenderneſs of these his friends had a great effect upon him, and he frequently extolled the mercy of God in making his dire situation comfortable thro' their humanity.

From the time of his commitment, he was entirely freed from any care about his support, his known, and even unknown friends, providing abundantly for him, and his gratitude on this account was testified upon every occasion. The zeal and ardent wishes of some of them, which they could  
 not



not but discover, led them and him to imagine, before the order for execution arrived, that he should find mercy. He gave admission to the hope of not being included in the death warrant, and thus, by the intrusion of fear, he had a very distressed night before the order came; and being thereby much agitated, and anxious to know the result of the report, he was not well prepared for the dreadful news. \* His friends, desirous to acquaint him with the decision of the Privy-council in as soft a manner as possible, began to open it to him by degrees; but he requested them to tell him the truth, for he saw by their countenances how the matter stood. Upon my seeing him soon after, he told me that he had only indulged himself within three days with hope of mercy, from what had been suggested to him by his friends, as he had all along, even from his first entrance into the goal, given himself up as a lost man.

\* It cannot be much wondered at, that he at length gave way to hope, as one of his friends had some days before sent him a congratulatory letter upon obtaining his pardon, which he told him he heard was procured through the intercession of the Prince of Wales.

He complained, when I saw him on Sunday morning as he lay on his bed, of a pain in his side : when I asked him to what cause he assigned it, he replied, *Lethalis arundo*, and a deadly arrow indeed. He was frequently visited, at his own request, by a sensible and pious minister, and with this gentleman and the unfortunate doctor I spent many serious hours. After the effects of the first shock had subsided, he became more composed, and his mind in general intent upon the greatest concern which can occupy a human mind, to be prepared for death.

As his sphere in life had rendered him an object of the attention of all classes of men, many serious minds were anxiously concerned about him ; and as numberless stories were propagated and believed to his dishonour, a torrent of letters poured in upon him, partly from religious sensible people, partly from well-meaning persons who had more zeal than knowledge. Besides all this, books of very different contents were sent to him ; so that he had such a collection of different systems of doctrine forced upon him in books and letters, as might distress and perplex any human being ; and indeed some of these letters were written in such a manner  
as

as betrayed the incapacity of the writers to be of any use to a person of his knowledge and character. He was also visited by persons of very different sentiments and complexions, but always mentioned his satisfaction when visited by men of sense and piety. Among others, he spoke respectfully of Mr. Wesley, and likewise of Mr. Romaine, who paid him a visit a short time before his death; from the last of these gentlemen he received peculiar comfort, and said that they parted mutually satisfied. He frequently appeared to have a deep sense of his past offences; and expressed, when he reflected upon the great love of God in the redemption of the world through Christ, his unworthiness, and a great abhorrence of his ingratitude towards him in having deviated from him and his divine precepts: this he often did with tears. He frequently bemoaned his having brought such dishonour upon religion, and upon the sacred function; and declared with great emotion, that if he could wipe off the offence he had thus given, he would gladly submit to the greatest tortures; and would rather die than return into the world again to offend his God, and act inconsistent with his holy will.



As several of the stories spread abroad against him came to my ears, I thought it incumbent on me to ask him several questions relative to the truth of them. He answered me in such a manner as plainly evinced that most of them were absolutely false, or greatly and inhumanly exaggerated. As he took pleasure to speak with his friend who visited him frequently with me, not only upon speculative points of divinity, but also about his own feelings, he often expressed his willingness to die a natural death, but painful apprehensions of a public execution, attended with all the tragic, and yet disorderly, parade usual in this country. He spoke of the execution of others who had suffered on account of their crimes, and said, he did not think that heroism was a proper state of mind for such; humble hope was the highest they could aspire to; heroism and triumph belonged to martyrs. He uttered frequently his thankfulness that he had enjoyed so much composure of mind, health, and comfortable rest free from any distressing dreams, since his confinement, and found himself more happy after his detection than before. He said, that he esteemed his affliction as a fatherly correction from God, to bring him into those paths



paths of rectitude from which he had for some years erred.

The day before his execution, he mentioned to me what a day of trial it would be, as he must on that day take a final leave of his dear wife, to whom he had been married 27 years, and who, he said, had been remarkably affectionate to him throughout that whole period. The same evening going into his room with his friend, he rose from his chair, and said, Now the bitterness of death is over! I am ready. He then related that he had taken a tender leave of his friends, and from his dearest friend, his wife. He said, "I was much afraid of this scene, but it passed over much easier than I could have possibly imagined, and Mrs. Dodd behaved on the occasion better than I expected: we parted as those who hope to meet again." While I was gone to the other prisoner, the friend I left with him had some very pleasing and moving conversation. To him he declared repeatedly, and yet with deep contrition, his readiness to die, and that he relied wholly and confidently on the merits of his Lord and Saviour. When I joined them again, he proceeded, in the same calm and pleasing manner, to testify his willingness to die;  
spoke

spoke of the love of God in Christ Jesus with peculiar energy, and with such a sense of his own unworthiness, as was a proof that he was sincere, and that his resignation to the execution of justice was not at all dissimulated, but genuine. He praised the Lord for the great work of redemption, by which sinners could be saved; and compared the great difference between the death of the most renowned Heathens, who lost all sight of their evil actions, and that of the humble, contrite Christian, who saw at one view the wisdom, holiness, and justice of God, and at the same time his infinite love and mercy in the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ. He had sometimes expressed his thoughts about our penal laws, that they were too sanguinary; that they were against, not only the laws of God, but of nature; and that his own case was hard, that he should die for an act, which he always declared to be wrong, but by which he never intended to injure any one individual; and that as the public had forgiven him, he thought he might have been pardoned. But now he laid all these thoughts touching himself aside, though he continued to think in the same manner of the penal laws to his end.

Upon

Upon the coming in of a faithful and steady friend, and a clergyman, he said, among other things, " I have requested of my friends to-day what I now request also of you. It is possible that, after my death, some of my kind friends who have so earnestly solicited my pardon, but in vain, and others, may charge the king and his counsellors with cruelty, and use improper language, out of love to me; make it known, that I declare this to be far from my thoughts: I love and honour the king; I doubt not his humanity: he and his counsellors have acted according to justice, and his Majesty would have extended mercy, if he could have thought it consistent with the welfare of the nation." He then lifted up his hands, and prayed, " O Almighty God, thou King of kings, bless our gracious king, support and strengthen him, establish his throne in righteousness; give peace in his day, O Lord, make an end of dissension, and put a stop to the present unnatural war. O give his counsellors wisdom, and bless them. Amen." The friend and clergyman having taken leave, we went to prayer, during which he shed many tears. When prayer was ended, he



he said, being still on his knees, " O Lord Jesus Christ, let a poor sinner yet speak unto thee, though unworthy : O strengthen my faith, comfort and support me, have mercy upon me, and forgive me my sins, for the sake of thy holy, precious blood. Amen."

In short, his whole deportment this evening was humble and calm, and bespoke a confidence of his future happiness. He said, that if the Lord would leave it to his choice to be now annihilated, by which means all would be over, or that he should die, and stand the chance of eternal life or eternal misery, he would not give up his hope of the glorious inheritance, no, not for ten thousand worlds.

On the morning of his death I went to him, with the Rev. Mr. Dobey, chaplain of the Magdalen, who he had desired to attend him to the place of execution. He appeared composed ; and when I asked him how he had been supported, he said he had had some comfortable sleep, by which he should be the better enabled to perform his duty.

As we went from his room in our way to the chapel, we were joined by his friend, who had spent the foregoing evening with him, and also by another clergyman. When we  
were



were in the vestry adjoining to the chapel, he exhorted his fellow sufferer, who had attempted to destroy himself, but had been prevented by the vigilance of the keeper. He spoke to him with great tenderness and emotion of heart, entreating him to consider that he had but a short time to live, and that it was highly necessary that he, as well as himself, made good use of their time, implored pardon of God under a deep sense of sin, and looked to that Lord by whose merits alone sinners could be saved. He desired me to call in the other gentlemen, who likewise assisted him to move the heart of the poor youth, but the Doctor's words and exhortations were the most pathetic and effectual. He lifted up his hands, and cried out, " O Lord Jesus, have mercy upon us, and give, O give unto him, my fellow sinner, that as we suffer together, we may go together to heaven." His conversation to this poor youth was so moving, that tears flowed from the eyes of all present.

When we went into the chapel to prayer and the holy communion, true contrition and warmth of devotion appeared evident in him throughout the whole service. After it was

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ended,

ended, he again addressed himself to Harris in the most moving and persuasive manner, and not without effect; for he declared that he was glad he had not made away with himself, and said he was easier, and hoped he should now go to heaven. The Doctor told him how Christ had suffered for them; and that he himself was a greater sinner than he, as he had sinned more against light and conviction, and therefore his guilt was greater; and that as he was confident that mercy was shewn to his soul, so he should look to Christ, and trust in his merits.

He prayed God to bless his friends who were present with him, and to give his blessing to all his brethren the clergy; that he would pour out his Spirit upon them, and make them true ministers of Jesus Christ, and that they might follow the divine precepts of their heavenly Master. Turning to one who stood near him, he stretched out his hand, and said, "Now, my dear friend, speculation is at an end; all must be real! What poor ignorant beings we are!" He prayed for the Magdalenes, and wished they were there, to sing for him the 23d Psalm.

After

After we had waited some time for the officers, he asked what o'clock it was ; and being told that it was half an hour after eight, he said, " I wish they were ready, for I long to be gone." He requested of his friends, who were in tears about him, to pray for him, to which he was answered by two of them, " We pray more than language can utter." He replied, " I believe it."

At length he was summoned to go down into a part of the yard which is inclosed from the rest of the gaol, where the two unhappy convicts and the friends of the Doctor were alone. On his seeing two prisoners looking out of the windows, he went to them, and exhorted them so pathetically, that they both wept abundantly. He said once, " I am now a spectacle to men, and shall soon be a spectacle to angels."

Just before the sheriff's officers came with the halters, one who was walking with him told him that there was yet a little solemnity he must pass through before he went out. He asked, " What is that?" " You will be bound." He looked up, and said, " Yet I am free, my freedom is there," pointing upwards. He bore it with Christian patience, and beyond what might have been expected ; and



when the men offered to excuse tying his hands, he desired them to do their duty, and thanked them for their kindness.\* After he was bound, I offered to assist him with my arm in conducting him through the yard, where several people were assembled to see him; but he replied with seeming pleasure, "No! I am as firm as a rock." As he passed along the yard, the spectators and prisoners wept and bemoaned him; and he, in return, prayed God to bless them.

On the way to execution he consoled himself in reflecting and speaking on what Christ had suffered for him; lamented the depravity of human nature, which made sanguinary laws necessary; and said he could gladly have died in the prison-yard, as being led out to public execution tended greatly to distress him. He desired me to read to him the 51st Psalm, and also pointed out an admirable penitential prayer from Rossell's Prisoner's Director. He prayed again for the king, and likewise for the people.

\* It was done in the passage leading to the chapel, by order of Mr. Akerman the keeper, to prevent his being gazed at; to whom he desired I would return his sincere thanks for all his civilities to him, even to the last.

When



When he came near the street where he formerly dwelt, he was much affected, and wept. He said, probably his tears would seem to be the effect of cowardice, but it was a weakness he could not well help; and added, he hoped he was going to a better home.

When he arrived at the gallows, he ascended the cart, and spoke to his fellow-sufferer. He then prayed, not only for himself, but also for his wife, and the unfortunate youth that suffered with him; and declaring that he died in the true faith of the gospel of Christ, in perfect love and charity with all mankind, and with thankfulness to his friends, he was launched into eternity, imploring mercy for his soul for the sake of his blessed Redeemer.

He delivered to me the following declaration, which he intended should have been read for him by me at the place of execution; but it being thought that it could not possibly be heard by the multitude, it was omitted.— I therefore here give it to the Public.

Dr.

**Dr. Dodd's last solemn Declaration.**

**T**O the words of dying men regard has always been paid. I am brought hither to suffer death for an act of fraud, of which I confess myself guilty with shame such as my former state of life naturally produces, and I hope with such sorrow as He, to whom the heart is known, will not disregard. I repent that I have violated the laws by which peace and confidence are established among men; I repent that I have attempted to injure my fellow-creatures; and I repent that I have brought disgrace upon my order, and discredit upon religion: but my offences against God are without name or number, and can admit only of general confession and general repentance.----Grant, almighty God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that my repentance, however late, however imperfect, may not be in vain.

The little good that now remains in my power, is to warn others against those temptations by which I have been seduced. I  
 701 have

have always sinned against conviction; my principles have never been shaken; I have always considered the Christian religion as a revelation from God, and its divine Author as the Saviour of the world; but the laws of God, though never disowned by me, have often been forgotten. I was led astray from religious strictness by the delusion of shew and the delights of voluptuousness. I never knew or attended to the calls of frugality, or the needful minuteness of painful oeconomy. Vanity and pleasure, into which I plunged, required expence disproportionate to my income; expence brought distress upon me, and distress, importunate distress, urged me to temporary fraud.

For this fraud I am to die; and I die declaring in the most solemn manner, that however I have deviated from my own precepts, I have taught others, to the best of my knowledge, and with all sincerity, the true way to eternal happiness. My life, for some few unhappy years past, has been dreadfully erroneous, but my ministry has been always sincere. I have constantly believed, and I now leave the world solemnly avowing my conviction, that there is no other  
name



name under Heaven by which we can be saved, but only the name of the Lord Jesus; and I entreat all who are here to join with me in my last petition, that, for the sake of that Lord Jesus Christ, my sins may be forgiven, and my soul received into his everlasting kingdom.

June 27, 1777.

WILLIAM DODD.



